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AUTHOR Falk-Ross, Francine
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ABSTRACT

This study examined methods of providing language evaluation and remediation services to students with language impairments in the regular classroom in order to focus on authentic classroom-based language and discourse. Evaluation was through observation of routine social uses of dialogue between students and teachers. Remedial strategies involved coaching behaviors situated in the classroom context. Three elementary school-aged children with expressive language difficulties each received language support three to four times each week, for approximately 30-minute periods. "Sit-in" language support involved providing individual cuing (visual, gestural, or tactile) and modeling to help the child participate competently in discourse; "pull-aside" language support consisted of discussions in alcoves or just outside the classroom to provide constructive feedback. "Pull-out" language remediation was used primarily at the beginning of the school year for formal evaluation and planning. Examples from sessions with each child illustrate the different types of support provided. Evaluation found a qualitative improvement in the students' classroom communicative competence and suggests that the guided participation in classroom discourse yielded appropriate communication strategies, which resulted in reinforcement and internalization. (Contains 24 references.) (DB)

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GUIDING LANGUAGE PARTICIPATION IN CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Francine Falk-Ross, University of Illinois-Chicago
National Council of Teachers of English - Research Assembly
Chicago, Illinos
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GUIDING LANGUAGE PARTICIPATION IN CLASSROOM DISCOURSE: STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Francine Falk-Ross

Considerable discussion has been initiated among educational specialists about the role and benefits of special, and often separate, educational systems of instruction within the school (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Stainbach & Stainbach, 1984; Wang et al., 1984). My experiences as a language specialist working in an elementary school with students having special language learning needs reflected some of the dilemmas presented by the often dissonant theory and practice of many special education programs (Falk-Ross, 1995). A main goal of the present study, then, was to move the prime evaluation and remediation site from an isolated resource room to the everyday classroom based on the hypothesized increase in authenticity and validity of a context-specific approach to language support through coaching.

Theoretical Framework

This study of classroom discourse is embedded in a communicative competence perspective, which is based on a social constructivist view of language and learning (Hymes, 1974; Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, language may be considered both a product and a process reflective of a social situation (Halliday & Hasan, 1985), i.e., purposefully motivated, situationally embedded, and culturally and historically influenced (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1989). Therefore, the 'text,' or unit of functional language within a social situation must be considered as a whole (Bakhtin, 1986; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984) and contributions to discourse are considered to be language choices.

Language, in general, is characterized by identifiable language patterns within specific activity structures, or genres (Bakhtin, 1986). Language form, content, and use vary with the situational context in which a language construction is embedded (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Hymes, 1970). Children formulate and modify their own emerging hypotheses of language rules

and conventions following the models they observe in their social environments (Vygotsky, 1978). This semiotic mediation occurs first on a social, or interpersonal, plane and then on a psychological, or intrapersonal, plane (Wertsch, 1985). More specifically, what the child learns from verbal interaction, or external speech, about how things work is transformed into organized thought, or inner speech, as she or he mediates and internalizes cognitive understandings of the world.

Beginning at a novice level of incompetence that requires assistance completing a task appropriately and ending at an expert level of competence that does not require supervision, learners move through this zone of proximal development, slowly assuming more and more of the responsibility for completing the task alone, while the expert provides less and less direction. Usually a series of progressively difficult movements, or interactions, are necessary to complete the process, each move introduced based on the success of the previous one. Rogoff (1990) refers to this as learning through "apprenticeship," i.e., tailored to individual needs and abilities in some culturally familiar situation. This coaching occurs as a model of conditions that includes immersion, demonstration, expectation, participation, approximation, and response (Cambourne, 1988; Holdaway, 1979). The final shift in responsibility to the student alone is in the form of a "handover" (Bruner, 1983).

Language participation in the school classroom provide specific examples of this learning model. Here, too, significant characteristic of language is the shared contextual nature of discourse. Speakers share common experiences, mutual needs, and physical surroundings that define the particular nature of the context constructed during their conversation (Bloome, 1982). In the classroom, where language is the major medium of teaching and learning, students must learn to recognize and use these language routines, or 'curriculum genres' (Christie, 1987), if they are to participate in discourse successfully (Cazden, 1988; Garcia, 1992; Gumperz, 1983; Pappas, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Children with language difficulties are at a disadvantage in communicating their ideas and questions in discourse; their contributions are often devalued and underestimated.

In most cases and in most schools, remediation for language difficulties is provided through resource, or pull-out, programs. Coaching is in the form of one-on-one instruction provides language correction and clear feedback; however, the larger context of the classroom is missing. In the resource room, the pace of conversation is slower, the competition for participation is reduced, and the language experiences are contrived. Often, the generalization and transfer of new and more appropriate language strategies by children with language difficulties is less successful.

Evaluation of language routines in the classroom's social context, i.e., defining the situation and the nature of the intersubjective connection, can provide clues to improved remediation, or regulation, of these students' language constructions in interactional exchanges through 'assisted performances' (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1979). A basic premise of this approach to language remediation is that the interpretation of assessment and results need to be focused on rich descriptions of authentic classroom-based language rather than on contrived formal testing instruments. That is, in order to help these children effectively, the primary evaluative information describing their language difficulties must be gained through observation of routine social uses of dialogue between students and their teachers, and the proposed strategies for remediating these problems must consist of coaching behaviors situated in the classroom context.

Methodology

Participants

Three elementary school-aged children experiencing expressive language difficulties (versions of word retrieval) in the classroom were studied as they were assisted in developing language strategies for communication competence in everyday discourse interaction. In each case, previous standardized language assessment and remediation approaches had been delivered in a resource context, resulting in weak identification and carryover of skills and in little change in

classroom interaction skills. This ethnographic study covers three cases, i.e., first, second, and fourth grade boys.

Procedures

The discourse patterns and contextualization cues characteristic of each child's classroom were collected through participant observations, fieldnotes, and audiotapes to characterize the focal children's everyday language experiences and to help them develop strategies to use language more effectively in this classroom discourse. Using the children's input during in-class and pull-aside meetings early in the study, new language strategies were suggested to improve communicative competence. A cueing system used by the language specialist and, following a period of collaborative consultation with the classroom teacher and student was developed to support the children's efforts in the classroom during everyday discourse.

Each child received language support three to four times each week, for approximately thirty minute periods. Each visit took one of three forms. 'Sit-in' language support was the most frequent form of intervention throughout the study. I sat next to or directly behind the student, using individual cueing-visual, gestural, or tactile-and modeling to help the child participate competently in discourse. Disruptions to classroom discourse and activities were kept to a minimum because an effort was made to use cueing strategies that are consistent with classroom routines and teaching goals. For example, visual and tactile strategies were used in relatively quiet periods in the classroom, such as during teacher-directed recitation and question-answer periods. Verbal cues may be used when a low noise level is acceptable in the classroom, such as in small group work and verbally interactive discourse is being used. This occurred during teacher-directed recitation and small group collaborative work.

Pull-asides allowed for more focused interaction between the student and language specialist, aide, or teacher, such as is common for other conferencing activities within the classroom. Pull-aside language support consisted of discussions in alcoves, back rooms, or just outside the classroom in the hall where the din of classroom conversation and activity was still

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perceptible. Language instruction in this setting was in the form of constructive feedback concerning just completed discourse or in anticipation of routines to follow. Students were able to initiate questions or rehearse language during this short interval of time, i.e., approximately ten minutes. Pull-asides were used when discussions in the classroom would be disruptive or when privacy was necessary. This form of language support was used frequently.

Pull-out language remediation was used at the beginning of the school year for individual formal testing periods and to set goals, organize problem-solving strategies, and to collaboratively develop meaningful cues to be used in the classroom. These sessions usually consisted of thirty minutes away from the classroom. After the initial few weeks, this became an infrequent form of intervention.

During each period of language support, an effort was made to develop metalinguistic awareness of language patterns, highlight specific areas of focus for each intervention period, and to use brief, focused comments to remind students of cues/rules/targets prior to the intervention period. This may have been in the form of an 'aside' or a quiet introduction as the language specialist sits down beside the child. The decision to meet in any particular setting was suggested by me or by the classroom teacher, but the student was the final decision-maker in choice of seating, cueing, initiating. Three examples are provided to illustrate the teaching strategies and their meaning.

----------EXAMPLE 1:

Facilitation cueing. MICKEY: Phase Two (December)

1 T: *(She directed this question to Mickey.)* Which picture goes with the baby? Which number down?
2 **M**: *(Mickey did not answer.)*
3 **F**: *(I whispered near his ear.)* Mickey, which picture are we on?
4 **M**: Here *(gesturing toward the picture)*, the baby (tadpole).
5 **F**: Which one down?*(I traced my finger down the line of pictures to help review the pictures to cue his answer.)*
6 T: Which one goes with the tadpole?
7 **F**: *(I followed his finger and again touched the choice he made.)* Tell this one.
8 **M**: *(Mickey raised his hand quickly, although the teacher was waiting patiently for his answer.)*

9 T: Mickey?
10 M: The frog.
11 T: Good. And what number is that?
12 M: *(He paused, still having his finger on the picture of the answer, 'frog.' I traced touched numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 cueing him as I put the numbers in a silent but mental count, as in a phrase.)* Five.
13 T: What number is that in ordinal numbers (names)? Like 'first,' 'second,' .....
14 M: *(Mickey was visibly counting in his head, mouthing the numbers, but at 'fifth' he stopped and looked around...)*
15 F: *(I touched the numbers and quietly counted.)* First, second, third, fourth, ...fifth.
16 M: *(In unison with me)*.....fifth.
17 F: Tell fifth.
18 M: Um...Fifth.
19 T: OK.
20 M: *(Mickey spoke louder, interrupting to repeat using a phrase.)* It's the...um ...fifth.
21 T: Fifth. That's right! It was a little hard there, but you kept trying.

---------- Facilitation

cues in the Example 1 included two instances of rephrased question cues in lines 3 and 5, and two instances of scaffolding comments (i.e., prompting with the verbal directive, "Tell it" in lines 7 and 17, and providing numbers in lines 12 and 15). Each cue was contextually specific, i.e., each was uniquely necessary to help Mickey retrieve an appropriate verbal response in the discourse environment occurring in the classroom at that time. Equally important was the modeling opportunities provided for the classroom teacher, who needed to learn strategies to individualize her discourse routines to help Mickey participate along with his peers. This form of help can be compared to the less useful previous individual practice sessions in the resource room, which attempted to duplicate this classroom environment but was not be as meaningful and reinforcing as the help provided in the classroom at the necessary time.

In Example 1, the classroom teacher tries to provide support to Mickey's responses by giving additional information. She adds the adjective 'ordinal' to the word 'number' to give additional information (line 13). She also begins the rote counting of ordinal numbers beginning at 'first' to give Mickey an additional context from which to retrieve the information.

This part of the class's reading lesson provided a positive experience for Mickey for several reasons. First, he provided four appropriate answers to the teacher's questions (lines 4, 10, and 12), answers he would not have been able to provide alone in these contexts. Second, he gained a successful taste of contributing to the classroom discourse, empowered enough to reenter with a louder and expanded version of his response (line 20). Third, the teacher's reinforcement (line 21) and his own perception of a successful experience were motivational factors that seemed to positively affect his attentional focus for the rest of the activity.

In Phase Two Mickey was beginning the "handover" phase of learning to use his language more competently in the classroom. More and more, according to his teacher's comments and my classroom fieldnotes, he was effectively taking an active role in using new language strategies to express and share what he knew or wanted to know. For example, he often changed his discourse contributions to conform with the classroom routines by answering within a time period closer to that expected by his peers and teacher. He adapted his language style to include phrases in place of one-word responses when he experienced difficulty with word retrieval. He also became a willing participant in classroom discourse, which was a large part of learning and sharing knowledge in school. Mickey, who needed prodding to enter discourse in the first few months of the school year, managed to assert himself (on occasion) in classroom discourse with competent comments, expand his language constructions using phrases, and to anticipate language opportunities by attending carefully to discourse.

----------EXAMPLE 2:

Rehearsal. VINCENT: Phase II (January)

1	T:	Let's think now about what this chapter's about and talk about what we've learned so far through this chapter in social studies. *(Hands went up.)*
2	T:	Aaron?
3	A:	Rules.
4	T:	OK. This is all about rules. What is a rule?
5	G1:	Something you obey.
6	T:	OK. Something that you need to obey. That's another word. What does 'obey' mean?
7	S1:	Laws.

8 T: Like laws. OK.
9 **V**: *(His hand went up.)* I know.
10 T: You have to obey laws, Vincent?
11 **V**: Yeh.
12 T: Certainly do. We're still trying to find out what 'obey' means.
13 **V**: *(To me)* I still think I can say (tell) it.
14 **F**: Then you should give your answer.
15 G2: *(Explained 'obey.')*
16 S2: It's when you have a law and you have to follow it.
17 T: Good. So we know that obey basically means things that you need to.....
18 **V**: *(Directed to me)* .....follow.
19 T: Follow...OK? So you're going to follow ....
20 **V**: *(Directed to me)* the laws.
21 T: The rules or laws. We need to follow the directions or .....
22 **V**: laws.
23 T: Things you need to do, right. What happens when you don't follow the rules or laws?
24 **V**: *(Looked at me, then raised his hand)*
25 T: Vincent?
26 **V**: You may go to jail.
27 T: Well, good. Yes.
28 S1: You can get hurt.
29 T: Yes, you can get hurt. We talked about that a lot.
30 S2: You have to suffer the consequences.
31 T: Exactly. That's what I was talking about. There are many things that would happen.
32 **V**: *(Aloud)* I don't know what she's talking about.
33 T: You know what consequences are, right?
34 **V**: *(Aloud)* No.
35 T: And if you don't obey you have to suffer the loss, like paying money, or missing a recess, getting a ticket or going to jail, or being grounded.
36 C: *(Oooh's and ahhh's are heard.)*
37 T: So it's in your best interest to you to make a wise decision and follow the rules and laws wherever those rules may apply.
38 **V**: *(Whispering to me)* It's better than going to jail.

In Example 2, verbal rehearsal was a start towards increasing his participation in classroom discourse. He learned to find clues from the other children's answers and questions, looking to me for acknowledgment that his answers were appropriate and correct, as is evidenced in Example 2. The classroom activity in this instance was a review and discussion of social studies content material from their text on rules or laws.

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Vincent first attempts to participate in the classroom discussion in his response to the teacher's search for a definition of 'obey' (line 9). Her response, i.e., repeating the two previous students' contributions (lines 5, 7), did not allow him to provide an appropriate answer. Instead, she must have assumed from previous language habits in the classroom, that his answer would be a duplication of another student's response or of her own. Vincent did not correct her impressions or assert himself, answering simply, "Yeh" (line 11), although he still wanted to attempt a definition for 'obey' (line 13). Vincent first used me as a 'sounding board' to provide feedback and encouragement, answering quietly to me (line 13, 18, 20), then to himself (line 22), and then by just looking toward me (line 24). Thus, he slowly decreased his need for support and became more confident in his ability to verbally participate in classroom discourse. In line 32 and 34 he even commented aloud to voice his confusion. Vincent was beginning to use new language strategies in the classroom to his advantage.

Vincent's new comfort in the classroom was evident in the new ease with which he handled language in reading and in giving specific information. In most instances, language was now taking the place of gestures and shrugs as he interacted verbally in classroom discourse with peers and teachers alike. For example, on one occasion after Vincent had answered a question directed to him by his teacher, a peer commented to me, "He always used to never know, like this" (imitating Vincent's frequent shoulder shrugs). Vincent, whose language consisted of overuse of ambiguous pronouns and growling behavior, learned to self-monitor his word retrieval using visual cues and attempted longer phrases to construct his responses.

----------EXAMPLE 3: Conferencing. HARRY: Phase II (January)

1 **F**: Before we finish today, I want to ask you about school. How is school going? Any problems?
2 **H**: It's OK.
3 **F**: It's going well?
4 **H**: Yeh.
5 **F**: Good. You've been so quiet these days, but you've been answering exactly right (in class). You haven't had any trouble with the words, getting the words. You

haven't used as many of your old habits, where you would say, "Well, mmm....well....I'm not sure." You just raised your hand, gave the right answer....it was perfect. And you gave the right meaning for the word. For example, if the teacher said, "What does a dog do?" you'd say *(in the past)*, "Well...I've seen a dog and I have a story about a dog" instead of saying, "A dog barks." Sometimes, before, your answers would not be on target. They didn't always answer the question. But now that's changed. And I think you weren't wiggling around so much. That was excellent. What were the other things you were trying to do?

6 **H**: *(Shrugged "I don't know.")*

7 **F**: Staying focused, you've done that. Not wiggling, that's better. Oh, give a good answer right away and then add details. You did that when I was watching. I'm going to do that a few more times. I'll come in your classroom and watch to see how it's all going. Then, if you have problems we need to work on, we can discuss them when we're alone.

8 **H:** OK. I'm taking medicine that makes me 'hyper' as a side effect *(to explain wiggling)*....for allergies.

9 **F**: Just for allergies?

10 **H**: *(He nods 'yes!')*

11 **F:** Thanks for telling me. I'll call your mom tomorrow about it.

In Example 3, our initial pull-aside discussions concerned the specifics of working together in the classroom. I assured Henry that my intention was not to increase the pressure he felt when he talked in class by drawing attention to his remark, but, instead, to decrease his difficulties making them by developing strategies and providing support.

The comments I made were to provide feedback concerning his language use in the classroom (line 5) and to indirectly remind and remotivate the continued use of new language strategies in future discursive interactions (line 7). Henry still needed help breaking his old language habits, which emphasized his word retrieval difficulties, and remembering to use new strategies. He needed an explanation of the metalinguistic process that he should use to incorporate the new strategies into his everyday language exchanges. His comment that he didn't know what he was doing (line 6) was probably not far from the truth due to his self-conscious attitude.

Henry worked hard this school year trying to assume responsibility for modifying and monitoring his language in classroom discourse. During his first four years in elementary school

he had developed alternative language and behavioral strategies, such as exaggerated gesturing and digressive monologues, that were not useful to him in the classroom. His teachers and parents, who had remarked to me about his obvious language difficulties and his decreased self-confidence in the classroom throughout previous school years, were now seeing subtle changes in Henry's language use. His progress was slow but forward moving, a significantly different result from previous years' remediation efforts. He may not have reached what parents and teacher felt was his true potential, but he was no longer criticized for problematic language and behavior. Henry's self-conscious attitude about his language was replaced by enough periodic successes to encourage him to be more assertive in entering classroom discourse with appropriate, if not always fluent, language constructions. All the teachers noted these changes; in several cases, peer relationships changed, as well. Each of the boys seemed happier, or more confident, now that he finally 'fit in' better.

Discussion and Implications

The key to these children's individual successes was that they gained language strategies as tools to participate in classroom discourse, the medium of educational activity and the mediating factor for learning, in general. In the fast pace of the classroom, most children gain a common knowledge of language routines and task procedures. Some children need clearer models and overt focuses coaching to learn to use language effectively as a tool. When their guided participation yielded appropriate communication, the strategies were reinforced and internalized.

The nature of the children's language contributions at the end of the school year indicated that language support through cueing and coaching strategies provided primarily in the classroom yielded a qualitative increase in their communicative competence in language discourse routines. For example, the children responded to teachers' questions more appropriately and expressed their thoughts more effectively within the classroom language routines than they had in previous resource (pull-out) language remediation programs. That is, the language changes were not always neat, smooth language. Their roles in the classroom changed from reluctant respondents to

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more active participants. Second, affective changes in language participation were also noticeable. That is, the children, empowered by their relative successes, were more willing to take risks in the amount of participation and the quality of responses in discourse opportunities, changing their roles within the classroom. Third, teachers' participation in guiding the language constructions of children with specific language difficulties--previously a job assigned to the speech/language pathologist in resource settings--became a shared responsibility.

Implications of this study include the need for more integrated strategies for teaching and learning in schools and more inclusive models of remedial assistance in the education of young children in the classroom. Heightened awareness of issues in teacher readiness for modifications in traditional IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) language discourse routines must also become an issue for discussion.

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